F-35 Lightning II Program

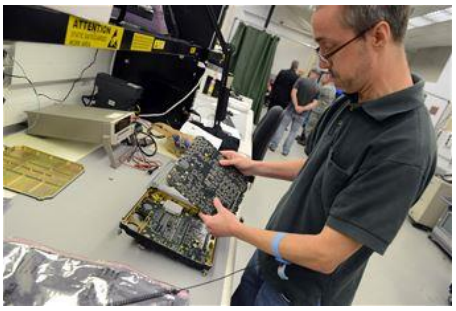
Public Affairs Release – 2015 09 03

F-35 SUSTAINMENT OFFICIAL VISITS ROBINS

When the Marines declared initial operational capability of its F-35B Lighting II July 31, it was a major milestone for the multi-service Joint Strike Fighter Program that's been in development for about 15 years.

The Air Force is scheduled to reach initial operational capability with its F-35A variant in 2016, and the Navy's F-35 is set for initial capability in 2018 or 2019.

Charles Brown, deputy director of F-35 Sustainment with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, recently paid a special visit to Robins to thank various 402nd Electronics Maintenance Group team members for their F-35 program contributions.



Michael Bailey, 568th Electronics Maintenance Squadron electronics technician, removes a faulty circuit card assembly from a Remote Input/Output unit, part of the F-35's communication system. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tommie Horton)

Brown toured the Electronic Warfare LRU Element facilities where Robins supports two vital F-35 components - the Remote Input/Output and the Vehicle Management Computer. "The work you do with components will only get bigger over the years," he said. "The workload that will come to Warner Robins during the next three to five years will increase tremendously.

Everyone in this room has contributed to the program, he said during a short presentation, citing various delivery deadlines from the three services which have been met. "You may say you only work on a few components, but it's pretty significant in the amount of work that hasn't materialized, but will in the future," he added.

Both components, which have been repaired here in the last year, offer a system of redundancy on the aircraft. They manage sensors and communication for its electronic warfare system.

A third line scheduled to be stood up soon will come from the F-35's global positioning system. Onsite will be a chamber used for environmental testing of the units, complete with a vibration table that will bring them to high and low temperatures to ensure they are working properly.

"As the fleet grows, it will be good work for Robins," said Ron Norton, 402nd EMXG electronic warfare supervisor. "The biggest thing is as much as we rely on component failures - we are a repair facility - the more things break, the more work we have. However, the failure rates are low and the aircraft is reliable, which is good for the program."

Before Brown departed on a short tour of EMXG, he shared insight into the program's history, as well as the recent road to IOC by the Marines, who will receive an aircraft capable of performing short takeoffs and distinct vertical landings. "Now that the Marine Corps has a fifth generation fighter - because of the work that has been happening here at Robins - they have a weapon system that can be called upon to do their missions anytime, anyplace, anywhere, which is what they do anyway," he said.

These STOVL aircraft were delivered to the first operational base at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, and Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, S.C., where Brown said special visits were also made to the F-35 workforce. Visits were also made to other Air Force operating bases, several Navy Fleet Readiness Centers, and industry partners including Pratt & Whitney, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman.

"The road to IOC has been a long and arduous journey," he said, before highlighting various successful testing periods and other milestones reached during the last few years. That included mention of the first time an F-35 took flight in 2008 at Lockheed Martin's aeronautics plant in Texas; the first time an F-35B performed a vertical landing (think of it like you would a helicopter silently hovering in place several feet above ground, before it gently drops straight down to land); working through additional scrutiny as a result of a bulkhead crack that was discovered on the same B variant; and later moving through sea trials when F-35Bs successfully landed on the USS Wasp.

On the Air Force side, the 33rd Fighter Wing, home to the F-35 Integrated Training Center, at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, is responsible for training the fleet's pilots and maintainers for the three services as well as international

partners. The Ogden Air Logistics Complex at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, has been tapped as home to the service's first operational F-35 wing.